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SUBJECT: SURINAMESE DEFENSE MINISTER SHARES VIEWS ON SECURITY

1. (U) DURING THE JUNE 14 OPENING OF A COURSE ENTITLED "THE THEORIES AND REALITIES OF THE SECURITY OF SMALL STATES" SPONSORED BY ANTON DE KOM UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, SURINAMESE MINISTER OF DEFENSE RONALD ASSEN PROVIDED A RARE GLIMPSE OF SURINAME'S DEFENSE STANDPOINT. IN HIS KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO STUDENTS AND INVITED GUESTS, ASSEN DEFINED SECURITY AS THE "ABSENCE OF FOREIGN ARMED MILITARY AGGRESSION, TERRORISM, AND LOCAL AND TRANS-NATIONAL CRIME." HE NAMED THE LACK OF FUNDING FOR PERSONNEL, TRAINING, AND OPERATIONS AND THE ENTANGLEMENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES WITH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS AS KEY FACTORS HAMPERING SMALL STATES IN THEIR EFFORTS TO BEEF UP THEIR SECURITY POSTURE.

2. (U) ASSEN SUGGESTED THAT SMALL STATES CAN OVERCOME THEIR FINANCIAL PROBLEMS IN PART BY FORGING ALLIANCES WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS BUT CAUTIONED THAT SUCH ALLIANCES COULD RESULT IN OVER-DEPENDENCE ON A SINGLE DONOR. TO EMPHASIZE THIS POINT, HE REFERRED TO THE UNANIMOUS CONCLUSION REACHED BY CARIBBEAN COMMANDERS IN CHIEFS WHO ATTENDED THE JUNE 1-3 CARIBBEAN NATIONS SECURITY CONFERENCE (CANSEC) IN MIAMI ORGANIZED BY THE U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND (SOUTHCOM) THAT SOUTHCOM'S MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THEIR COUNTRIES IS ESSENTIAL TO THEIR EFFORTS TO PROMOTE SECURITY. ASSEN RECOMMENDED THAT SMALL STATES DIVERSIFY THEIR MILITARY SPONSORS TO PREVENT THEIR OVER-DEPENDENCE ON A SINGLE DONOR FROM BECOMING A "POLITICAL MECHANISM IN FOREIGN HANDS." AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, HE CONCEDED THAT THE NUMBER OF STATES WILLING TO GIVE CONSIDERABLE MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO CARICOM IS LIMITED.

3. (U) ASSEN CALLED ATTENTION TO CARICOM'S ONGOING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM PROPOSED BY CARICOM HEADS OF STATE ONE YEAR AGO. HE SAID THAT CARICOM MEMBER-STATES ARE PREPARING THE FOUNDATION FOR A "REGIONAL RAPID RESPONSE MECHANISM" THAT WOULD ENABLE CARICOM TO COMBAT AND ELIMINATE THREATS TO NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SECURITY AND TO MANAGE POLITICAL CRISES OR DISASTERS. NOTABLY, HE DID NOT ELABORATE ON WHICH ALLIES WOULD BE PICKING UP THE TAB FOR SUCH A FORCE. IN CLOSING, ASSEN URGED CARICOM MEMBER STATES TO INVEST MORE IN NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES, WITHOUT ELABORATING ON SURINAME'S OWN PLANS ON THAT FRONT.

4. (SBU) COMMENT. THE CONTINUING FALLOUT TO HOLD A NEW HORIZONS EXERCISE HERE THIS SUMMER HAS CLEARLY INFLUENCED ASSEN'S REMARKS. THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY SURPRISE BY THE PUBLIC CRITICISM OF ITS FAILURE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AN INFUSION OF CASH INTO THE ECONOMY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEDICAL CLINICS. ONE PARLIAMENTARIAN WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE GOVERNING COALITION ASSERTED THAT SURINAME'S SOVEREIGNTY WAS WORTH MORE THAN U.S. HANDOUTS. CLEARLY ASSEN IS PICKING UP ON THIS THEME, WHILE RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF U.S. ASSISTANCE, ASSERTING SURINAME'S INDEPENDENT AND PRINCIPLED POSITION IN ENTERING INTO AGREEMENTS WITH FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS. THIS STRUTTING POSTURE IS GOOD FOR LOCAL CONSUMPTION IN THE RUN UP TO NEXT YEAR'S ELECTION. ASSEN, HOWEVER, REALIZES THAT NO OTHER DONOR IS WAITING IN THE WINGS TO ASSIST THE SURINAMESE MILITARY. END COMMENT.

BARNES

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